

242 PRINCESS STREET – BATHGATE BLOCK
Barber and Barber, 1882-83



The Bathgate Block, with its multiple round-arched openings and decorative brickwork, boldly reflects the era in which it was built and the ornate style of the designers who conceived it.

The masonry warehouse was erected in 1882-83 just as a speculative development boom was coming to an end. Its location at the northwest corner of Princess Street and Alexander Avenue was somewhat removed from the main business centre, but over time the streetscape filled with commercial and industrial structures. The Bathgate Block now stands as one of only 14 intact buildings from the 1880s that remain in or adjacent to the Exchange District, a national historic site.

The warehouse also is the only known complete structure that survives from the once-extensive portfolio of the city's first major architectural firm, Barber and Barber.

Charles A. Barber (1848-1915) was an Ontarian who came to Winnipeg in 1876 and soon began designing schools, business blocks and residences. His practice reached its zenith in the early to mid-1880s, assisted by James R. Bowes and brother Earle W. Barber (1855-1915). The partners snapped up commissions for projects such as the Gerrie, Dundee, Bawlf, Benson, Bird Estate, Hargrave, and Clements blocks, Manitoba and St. John's colleges, Knox Presbyterian Church, the second City Hall (1883-86), Police Court Building, and Grand Union and Leland hotels.

Following controversy over the City Hall project and other matters, the Barbers left Winnipeg in 1887 to open offices in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Earle Barber stayed in the United States, but Charles Barber returned to the city in the early 1890s. Among his last significant local designs were the Grain Exchange Building (1892) and McIntyre Block (1898). In the early 1900s, he was arrested in Montreal and imprisoned for committing extortion with violence. He died in British Columbia.

The Barbers specialized in exuberant versions of the revival styles of architecture that were popular in the Victorian era. Typical of their approach, an early drawing of the Bathgate Block contained decorative elements that were not included in the final building. The warehouse nonetheless received considerable Romanesque Revival-style detailing.

It is a three-storey structure, with a rubble-stone foundation, solid brick exterior walls and interior frame of heavy square timber beams and posts, now reinforced by steel components. Rubble-stone walls in the basement and brick walls on the upper floors originally divided the interior into three sections.

The Princess and Alexander façades are dominated by trios of large round-arched openings symmetrically separated into bays by attached brick and stone pilasters. Arches around the main-floor doors and windows on the Princess elevation present an arcade-like effect. Additional ornamentation is provided by brick drip moulding, stone sills, a

belt course between the first and second floors, corbelled brickwork, and quoin-like brick accents on the building's north- and southeast corners.

The now-altered roofline originally featured a parapet adorned by pilaster caps, metal coping and pediments above each bay of the two finished façades. The pediments contained sunburst panels in semi-circular arches and corbelled brickwork, but only the panels remain. Among other changes over the years, some doors and windows have been enclosed, new doors have been opened, and some, though not all, interior spaces and finishes have been altered.

The building was constructed for, and owned until 1888 by, William Bathgate, a retailer and managing director of the Manitoba Electric and Gas Light Co. Bathgate, a Scot, went to the United States in the early 1850s, then worked in Eastern Canada in the 1860s and 1870s. After coming to Winnipeg in 1878, he engaged in the furniture business before joining the light company, where he remained from 1883 to 1897.

Among the Bathgate Block's long-term occupants were Edwin Bromley, a tent and canvas manufacturer (1891-1926), Beach Foundry (1924-c.1973), and J.H. O'Connor and Son, Ltd. washing machines (1926-c.1950). Other tenants included wholesalers, manufacturers and commission agents.